

EDITORIAL

APPRECIATION

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When the concept of a Readers' Award was first floated at this magazine in 1986, our founding editorial director, Isaac Asimov, expressed some skepticism. He believed that a sale to a professional market—where a story's publication would reach thousands of readers—was the real achievement. He preferred to see authors celebrate that accomplishment rather than compete with each other for prizes and awards. The Good Doctor was embarrassed when his tale of "Robot Dreams" won the first *Asimov's* Readers' Award for best short story. Although he agreed to accept the certificate, he wouldn't accept the check for a hundred dollars that accompanied the award. Isaac was not against awards, of course. In a different conversation a few months later, he told me that he hadn't felt himself a complete success until his peers, the Science Fiction Writers of America, named him a Grand Master. He just felt that his most important achievement was that people read and enjoyed his work.

Kim Stanley Robinson's story, "Mother Goddess of the World," was the winner of our Second Annual Readers' Award for best novella. His tale of "The Blind Geometer" had recently won the Nebula Award as well. On our way to the Readers' Award celebration that year, I mentioned Isaac's wistful comments about the Grand Master Award to Stan. Stan was stunned. Despite all his accomplishments, even Isaac Asimov needed reassurance? Did this mean the situation was hopeless for the rest of us?

Later that evening, Stan let Isaac know that he did not take the Good Doctor for granted. In his acceptance speech Stan said, "I also thank the person whose science fiction introduced me to the field and who has been a continuing inspiration ever since—Isaac Asimov." Isaac was delighted by this very public tribute. In his February 1989 editorial, he wrote that after Stan's speech, "I waved and yelled and shouted."

I've always thought that Isaac's desire for SFWA's Grand Master Award had more to do with the human need to set goals and strive forward than it did with any further wish for career validation. After all, by 1987 Isaac had already won four Hugo Awards, two Nebula Awards, and five *Locus* Poll Awards. In 1982 he'd finally made the New York *Times* best sellers' list as well. Yet, if even Isaac was not quite satisfied, then what about all the unsung scribes—those that only win one or two awards, those that only end up with one or two nominations, and those that are never even nominated?

Every year we publish dozens of stories that don't rise to the top of our Readers' Poll. Some of my favorites have ended up among these under recognized tales. Isaac's droll George and Azazel fantasies and Steven Utley's quiet Silurian stories never made a big splash on our polls.

And then there are the stories that win the Readers' Awards yet don't appear on the other award ballots. The Hugos and the Nebulas are usually limited to five nominees per category so it's not surprising that our poll finalists rarely overlap with the finalists for these awards. A more useful comparison might be *Locus Magazine's* Recommended Reading List. That poll will often recommend fifteen to sixteen novellas and fifty to sixty suggestions in the short story and novelette categories.

Yet despite this broad array of stories and despite the fact that many *Asimov's* tales end up on the *Locus* List, there have been winners of our Readers' Award Poll that

have not received wider recognition. Among those are four of Kristine Kathryn Rusch's award-winning novellas. Is this a conspiracy against Kris? Well, in 2013 Sandra McDonald and Megan Arkenberg tied for best short story yet, neither made it onto the list. Naomi Kritzer's 2014 winning short story and Carol Emshwiller's 2011 winner weren't there either. Could this be a conspiracy against *Asimov's* women writers? On Tuesdays and Thursdays I might entertain such suspicions, but then I am reminded that Allen M. Steele is also the author of a number of Readers' Award winners that haven't received nods from *Locus*. Recent stories by Will McIntosh, Derek Künsken, David Erik Nelson, and others have also missed the *Locus* list.

These tales are richly varied and engaging. Still, there are many rewarding tales on the *Locus* Recommended Reading List. *Vive la différence!* And on the plus side, *Asimov's* has been the recipient of *Locus's* Best Magazine Award for the past four years. Which brings us back to Isaac's contention that a story's real award is to be published and read by as many people as possible.

I recently came across an amusing Facebook comment by Daniel Hatch. "I've been publishing stories for twenty-five years now, and every time someone says they've read one of them, I feel like I've won a Hugo. I think I have seven of them." Dan is a frequent contributor to *Analog*. Although his stories haven't won awards, they have been contenders for the AnLab Award and Dan has had fiction on the *Locus* Recommended Reading List. When I asked permission to quote him, he said, "Feel free to use this. You could even mention my name. That would make me feel like I've won a Nebula."

So readers, pay attention to those urls and hashtags in my introductory notes to many of our stories. Let those writers know when you read and enjoy their tales. An appreciative comment may not be a Hugo or a Nebula, but it can be exactly what an author needs to keep producing their very best stories.